

## Jesus as Boy and Youth: In Christian Education

REVEREND MARIO BARBERA, S.J.<sup>1</sup>

THE longest period in the life of Jesus—from His twelfth to His thirtieth year—is compressed in the Gospel in the briefest and most summary description: "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them. And His mother kept all these words in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men." It is the time of life which follows in the wake of childhood and is aptly termed the period of adolescence, the period, to wit, which sees the bodily stature grow visibly and the human faculties unfold progressively hand in hand with physical growth: *adolescere*, up to the age when a man is said to be an adult. And as the bodily growth is deemed complete about the age of twenty-one, so is the limit of the adolescent period, in a strict sense, also marked by that turning-point of age. Following upon that comes the remaining span of youth, or early manhood, which, in the general estimate, runs to the thirtieth year. On the other hand, if, besides the physical, we take the mental growth and the full development of the reasoning powers into account, we may, in a broader, yet a true sense, consider Him still an adolescent, who has not yet attained the maturity of the adult, *i. e.*, his thirtieth year. This, at all events, is the common reckoning and is implied in the logical relation between the present participle *adolescens* and the past participle *adultus*.

Consistently with all this, the Evangelist characterizes the entire period from the twelfth to the thirtieth year in the life of Jesus, with the salient feature of growth and progress in His sacred humanity, taking in, as the Holy Father's Encyclical on Education broadly puts it: "the whole aggregate of human life, physical and spiritual, intellectual and moral,

<sup>1</sup>Translated from the Italian by Rev. Demetrio Zema, S.J.

individual, domestic, and social." Whence He is, in the words of the same Encyclical: "the universal model accessible to all, especially to the young in the period of His hidden life, a life of labour and obedience, adorned with all virtues, personal, domestic and social, before God and men."

This is so much the truer because in Him human nature was complete and perfect: "Wherefore it behove Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren." From which, we understand that, in body and soul, He was like to us in all except sin, and yet "in the likeness of sinful flesh"; that is to say, His body was subject to pain and death and to all the pangs and frailties to which the flesh is heir, exclusive of any weakness that would imply disorder or impropriety, or of any fault connected with concupiscence, which cannot be thought of in Christ. Thus He was subject to hunger, thirst, weariness, in the purely physical order, and, in the realm of the psychical, to those natural feelings of repugnance to pain and death, and, generally speaking, to the heavy-heartedness that follows thereon. Sufferings and infirmities such as these, the peculiar lot of human nature subject as it is to pain, He willed to make His own that He might thereby become merciful, as Saint Paul explains, and furnish withal an example of submission to God's will in such things; and so "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." He could, therefore, urge, in all truth: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart," an appeal embracing in its scope whatever concerns acceptance of God's decree in the trials and contradictions which the life of man cannot escape, and in the midst of which He stands out as a pattern, touchingly appealing to the young with all the pathos of the prophet's words: "*I am poor and in labours from my youth.*" But, more than all else, does Jesus Christ, our Lord, offers an example of progress specially adapted to the formative period of youth, such as was described in the brief but pregnant words of Saint Luke.

We may begin by reflecting on the nature of advancement as it was in Jesus, reasoning this out with the theologians from the basic truth that He was God-Man, and recalling that in Jesus Christ the sacred humanity possessed no human personality of its own but was taken up and appropriated by the Second Divine Person in the Hypostatic Union. We readily conceive how Jesus Christ grew and

advanced in age, *helikia*, in both senses of this word, *i. e.*, in years and in stature, as happens with every single mortal. The further truth is, however, that the vegetative and sensitive life of Jesus grew free from all blemish and was graced with such perfection as well became a human body that was untouched by Adam's taint or any of its sequels, singularly full of Grace, and exalted to the sublime heights where human nature was made the very Word's own. With such reserve powers behind Him, Jesus advanced from infancy to childhood, from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence even unto full maturity, growing in stature and strength, acquiring the while that sturdy virility which is the natural reward of toil. And day by day all these marks of approach to manhood displayed themselves in His outward mien progressively and in perfect unison with that comeliness that befitted each successive period of His years.

"He advanced in wisdom!" We must take this primarily to mean His experimental knowledge such as the mind acquires through the senses, particularly, when we bear in mind that He, no less than ourselves, possessed a soul that was entire and perfect and "only through the sense it apprehendeth what then it worthy makes of intellect" (Dante's "Paradiso").

The Angelic Doctor explains it thus:

The acquired knowledge of Christ is caused by the active intellect which does not produce the whole at once, but successively; and hence by this knowledge Christ did not know everything from the beginning, but step by step, and after a time, *i. e.*, in His perfect age; and this is plain from what the Evangelist says, *viz.*, "that He increased in knowledge and age together."

And Suarez puts the same truth in other words when he says:

The soul of Christ did not from the first moment of its creation, possess that human knowledge which begins with the perception of sensible things. That He acquired by degrees as time went on. We must then accept as true the view commonly held by theologians to the effect that not only by the perception of His Senses, but also by the apprehension of the intellect, through sense perception, Christ acquired a fund of experimental knowledge preluded by the mental impressions necessary thereto, all of which He did not have from the beginning.

As to the beatific vision and His infused knowledge, there could, of course, be no increase in the soul of Christ. The Hypostatic Union demanded that these higher forms of knowledge should be in Him in all their possible fulness from the first instant of His conception. Nor could He, for the same reason, advance in Grace which He possessed in superabundant measure. Yet for all that, as theologians explain, and as exegetes interpret the matter, while these supernatural prerogatives of wisdom and grace were superlatively in Christ as to "habit," *i. e.*, as permanent qualities, still He truly grew as regards the "acts" and the effects springing from the "habit," since these "acts" were of themselves capable of increasing grace and merit notwithstanding that Christ, because of the infinite dignity of His Person, could not grow in holiness.

All this is in the mind of the inspired narrator when he tells us that He grew before God, seeing that He performed works of wisdom and virtue with the number and perfection of which the Father was well pleased; and before men, inasmuch as in the actions proportionate to His age, He gave clearer proof each day of those virtues and gifts that made Him lovable to all, whether as a child, or as a boy, or as a young man; even as the sun whose glory remaining the same, yet to us appears brighter and brighter the higher it mounts above the horizon.

From all this we may appreciate what a harmony of virtues and gifts, both natural and supernatural, shone forth in Jesus in the flowering of His youth, and how, without appearing to be more than the son of humble folk, inhabitants of a little town like Nazareth, He led a life of labor and obedience. And so we may contemplate Him as He moved about the modest home helping Mary with her domestic tasks and Joseph with his carpentry, a work which He continued to carry on alone after St. Joseph's death, for His Holy Mother's and His own support. The gentle courtesy of His manner towards His parents and among His friends and neighbors was that of a youth nobly born. On the Sabbath, he went to the Synagogue, and with the faithful listened to the interpretation of the Law. His diversions were those of the young people of His own age; walking through the fields, musing thoughtfully on the beauties of nature around Him, watching with keen interest and pleas-

ure, the flocks of sheep, the harvests and the vintage, studying the flowers, the trees, the birds and other such objects and scenes, on which later He was to draw for the parables and similes so exquisitely illustrative of His teachings.

Saint Luke's compendious description offers to pious contemplation the amplest scope for imaging with fair probability the great variety of incident and circumstance which went to fill so long a span of youthful life as was that from the twelfth to the thirtieth year. The very length of the period ought to give to the example of the youthful Savior a universality that is rich in pedagogical value for the youth of all time. For they can picture Him not only as He must have been at each one's own age, but also as He must have conducted Himself in all the events of life, inclusive of the big and little ups and downs through which youthful lives must pass on the way to maturity, and above all in those vital matters of precept distinctly marked out in the Gospel: Obedience, labor and progress in virtue. And it is precisely in the variable and diverse transitions of life which hinge on the vital points just mentioned, that educators of youth can and ought to present and describe Him to their young charges.

Thus viewed, Jesus cannot but become sweetly, and at the same time, powerfully attractive to young minds and inspire them with a spirit of generosity in the practice of virtue. In this manner, He exercises an influence over them that is more irresistible, the more vividly our youths grasp the meaning of His life, and the more zealously they are led to understand and live a life of intimacy to which Jesus invites them by choosing to live their life in every respect, and to be their brother, companion and friend. This, Saint Thomas expresses beautifully and with sincere truth in one of his Eucharistic hymns we so much admire: "By His birth, He joined us in fellowship."

How pedagogically efficacious example can be, needs no argument. It is more powerful than any other stimulus in education. But this efficaciousness grows in power beyond measure when the model or exemplar is made accessible, well known, and above all, lovable and loved. Now, precisely, such an exemplar did Jesus become for young people, first of all, by shunning, until His thirtieth year, any oddity and severity whatsoever in His life; by refraining

from any extraordinary manifestation of His divinity; and by adapting His youth to the ordinary conditions of life that prevail at all times and in all places. Nay more, He even bound His young life with ours by the ties of tender affection and friendship, so that while He remains the ineffable God, He, at the same time, makes Himself approachable and lovable by all the charms of a true Son of man.

It is well nigh impossible for the heart of a youth to remain so insensible as not to be captivated the moment he really understands all that the adolescent Jesus means to him. To be thus won to the young Jesus it is enough to reflect on what an inexhaustible source of sweetness and light is stored up in the few words of the sacred narrative—words that welled from the most pure and gentle heart of Her who “kept all these words in her heart”; for beyond doubt, it was from Mary’s lips that Saint Luke caught these words as well as those others so full of charm and deep significance concerning the infancy of Jesus. In close keeping with these utterances of Mary come the words of the Beloved Disciple, describing Jesus as “full of grace and truth,” and those of the ardent Apostle Saint Paul: “God, our Saviour, manifested His kindness and love.”

The power of example grows apace when the exemplar spends and sacrifices himself without limit in giving the greatest conceivable proof of his love. This, Jesus did to make all approaches to Himself open and easy, and the better to be able to strengthen us in our wants and sufferings, He has willingly chosen for Himself the way of poverty, humiliation, privation and pain. He grew in His pure and lovable body only to measure up to the sacrifice of the Cross for our ransom and salvation, and then to leave with us that Body as the Eucharistic nourishment of our souls.

To crown all, the magnetism of example attains the supreme, even infinite height of its power when it lives and works in us with its own vitality. This can truly be said of the God-Man alone. He, as the Encyclical on Christian Education affirms, “is the fountain-head and giver of life and virtue.” A merely human pattern of virtue can make but an indirect appeal by suggesting and inspiring imitation, but of its own substantial vitality it cannot give. That only Jesus Christ can do by means of His Grace; a veritable and

truly divine force which is nothing less than a joint-possession on our part of His supernatural Life.

This, after all, under every aspect, human and divine, the most effective educational influence emanating from our youthful Savior Jesus Christ, is the only pedagogy that can energize the young of every age and every station by the force of those four sources of inspiration we have pointed out in His faultless example: a most lovable attractiveness, nearness, and most intimate accessibility to all, the purest and most unselfish love, a living and mighty—nay, an almighty—strength.

On the manner in which our educators and guides of youth can apply this supremely vital discipline, will depend the robust training and the salvation of our young people; and this the more so because now, as never before, do so many sinister forces imperil the innocence of their manners, the orthodoxy of their religious belief, and the integrity of their whole moral training; never heretofore were the allurements of the senses, the pitfalls of unbelief, and, above all, the signs of a spirit of insubordination and rebellion so multiplied and widespread.

Of this the same Encyclical speaks to meet an objection so common today in the secular atmosphere that pervades the whole texture of modern life; it even insinuates itself into the minds of Christian educators, if only in the form of a certain timidity and disinclination to set Jesus Christ up as a model in all the circumstances of young people's lives: The scope and purpose of Christian education, we are told, appears to the worldly-minded as an abstraction, or rather, as something impossible of attainment without stifling and dwarfing natural faculties, and without renouncing the activities of the present life, and hence is something foreign to social life and temporal prosperity, an obstacle to all progress in letters, arts and sciences and every work of culture. Briefly, they deem it an ideal renunciation, of indolent passivity, as they say. The Holy Father then proceeds to cite the answer which Tertullian gave to this objection inspired as it has been by pagan ignorance and prejudiced from the very dawn of Christianity, and concludes:



The true Christian, far from renouncing the activities of earthly life or stunting his natural faculties, rather expands them and lends them greater perfection by coordinating them with the higher life of Grace. He thus ennobles what is natural in life itself and secures for it more strength in the material and temporal order, no less than in the spiritual and eternal.

From this it follows that we must properly evaluate and bring the intimate and universal closeness of Christ's example to bear on every young man's estate without exception, be he laborer or student, soldier, or employee, or whatever else you please; and in every circumstance of his life, whether domestic or public, in such wise that not only before God, but before men as well, he proves himself a most industrious worker, both at home and in his shop, the best all-round student in school, at home and abroad, in time of relaxation and in the very movements of his physical exercises, the most disciplined and the bravest soldier, the most faithful and diligent workman, and so on. To such a perfection, indeed, may a young man arrive, if he has understood to the point of living it, the affability and the very life of Jesus, particularly, in the Holy Eucharist.

The surest method of producing these fruits of virtue in the young is to set before them the mirror of the adolescent Jesus. Therein lies the secret of educational efficiency as a factor, distinct, though not separate, from the means of Grace and of Christian ascetical practice. We say distinct and not separate, because the practice of religious piety among the young cannot be divorced from the practice, common to every age, of Christian mortification and of the Christian virtues and a proportionate use of the means of grace which are prayer and the Sacraments. Yet, regretfully enough, not all educators know how to employ the pedagogical devices that are most effective.

One of the happiest pedagogical applications yet made of the example of the young Jesus to the psychology of young people, is to be seen in a movement begun and promoted among the youth of the schools by the American Jesuit, Father William H. Walsh, S.J. He takes his start from the universally recognized truth that the period of adolescence has a decisive importance in that it gives a determining direction to the rest of one's life, according to the Holy Ghost's own admonition: "A young man according



to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it." Father Walsh then proceeds to coordinate this truth first of all with a condition of fact, also a matter of general knowledge, viz., that modern life has surrounded young people with a legion of dangerous allurements; and then with the psychological corollary that a spiritual counter-agent of strong attraction must be found to keep and fortify them on the straight path. Such a stabilizing incentive must work from the very heart and center that at once attracts and diffuses Christian life. That can be none other than Christ, our Lord, as He manifests Himself in that phase of His human life that is most lovable and most appealing to young people: Jesus as a Boy! To Him must young minds and hearts be directed in a devotion of strong love along the lines of certain basic appeals.

The first of these is addressed to their apprehensive faculties: mind and imagination. These are directed to dwell upon and picture Jesus in all His throbbing life as He was at their own age, placed in their own condition and engaged in their own or similar occupations. As helps to portray Jesus in all the local color of His young life, the pictures of artists and the descriptions of teachers skilfully given with propriety of time and place, are put to excellent service. In the way of pictures, Father Walsh places before the eye of young people two or three thoughtfully chosen ones which are made the more eloquent by a brief and significant verbal characterization. . . .

Bringing home still more impressively the nearness of Christ to our daily lives, is that school of art which pictures Jesus in the closest touch with the men and conditions of modern life. The writer well recalls how deeply moved he was on an occasion, as he stood contemplating a painting wherein the Savior is seen in the act of carrying the Cross. Surrounding Him are a throng of people representing all ages and occupations of contemporary modern life. Some follow Him with loving compassion; others stand stolidly by with cold indifference; others even hurl insults at Him; and among the last, alas, one is saddened to behold a teacher leading his pupils of the "lay" school—the school that knows not God!

Concerning explanations and descriptions to be presented by teachers to their pupils, the subjects range over

every phase of youthful life. There are, for example, "The Boy Jesus and Obedience," "The Boy Jesus and Work," "The Boy Jesus and Study," "The Boy Jesus and Play," "The Boy Jesus and Companions," and other such.

The second means of guidance bears upon the will and sentiments of young folk, especially their enthusiasm and loyalty. It is easy to see how well adapted these sentiments are to arouse in their hearts, ready as by instinct, we may say, to admire whatever is beautiful, pure, noble, and heroic. Moved by emotions such as these, a young man will, with spontaneous eagerness, choose, look upon and deal with Jesus as his bosom friend, guide, leader and king, in whose leadership he glories, and on whose side he purposes to remain steadfastly loyal, nay, even to signalize himself among other youthful followers and friends of Jesus by going out of his way, as occasion offers, to win for Him other followers and friends.

To stir this kind of enthusiasm in youthful hearts, one needs only to apply to boys' psychology the inspiring parables which Saint Ignatius sets before us in the Spiritual Exercises. viz., "The Kingdom of Christ" and the contemplation of "The Two Standards."

But love is proved by deeds, and sentiment, to be more than mere sentimentality, must spur one to action. Accordingly, let us note what further our veteran educator suggests, keeping in mind, as he does, that young heads must not be bewildered with elaborate and multiple devotions. He proposes no more than two simple and practical principles or resolutions meant to give direction and motive power to their whole conduct. The one is general in its scope and consists of a positive disposition to stand on the side of their Divine Leader with firm and generous devotedness and to let it be seen, always with prudence and due regard to circumstances, exactly where they stand whenever confronted with a situation which borders on the sinful. This does not necessarily need to be done in words, their very manner may be more eloquent. And by way of strengthening themselves in this disposition and thus clinching immediate profit therefrom, they are directed to form the habit of making at once in their hearts an act of reparation each time they chance to see or hear anything that may seem to offend God.

The other resolve is more definite and to the point. It is to offer a daily gift to their loving Guide and Friend in the form of at least one act, or word, or counsel, or prayer, for the spiritual good of a companion or of any one who might be in need of it. And they are urged to recall on going to sleep whether they have perchance omitted this daily act of homage.

By means of these two resolves, a young man cannot but school and strengthen himself in fidelity and loyalty of heart and action towards Jesus, His Model, Leader and King, and in respect for himself and others.

All the exercises of this devotion possess a distinctively educational value which fit most harmoniously into the whole scheme of Christian life and into the whole scheme of Grace; for it is by the means of sanctification that the lives of our young are to be in every respect trained and modelled on the life of Jesus in general, and on the divine pattern of the Crucified in particular.

Hence, what we may call the pedagogical devotion to the Adolescent Jesus, constitutes neither a distinct Sodality, nor a society of peculiar aim, but is something to be practised in every condition of life among the young people of both sexes, at home and at school, and above all, in Sodalities of the Blessed Virgin and other pious associations (for what could please Mary more than affectionate loyalty to her Divine Son?) and in every juvenile unit whose object is Catholic action, culture, or any other good purpose. From this every other devotion will draw greater vitality and strength, especially, devotion to young people's patrons: those saintly youths and holy virgins, who, in loveliness, are like fragrant lilies among which feeds the Lamb of God.

It is in order to accomplish this very purpose of reaching all that the zealous promoter of this movement, Father Walsh, publishes and circulates a descriptive booklet which has been translated into various languages.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the booklet we read a summary statement of the devotion, and, following it, a very beautiful prayer to the Boy Jesus.

<sup>2</sup>William H. Walsh, S.J., "A Call of the Shepherd to the Youth of the Fold," and a young people's hymnal, with words and music. "Loyal and True—Youth's Rallying Hymn to Christ, the King, and other suitable hymns for the Boy Jesus devotion." Price, \$0.25, with the author, 986 Park Avenue, New York City.

Since these two documents are, in themselves, sufficient to give a complete idea of the pedagogical adaptability of this devotion, we reproduce both of them in the footnotes. We may, also, incidentally, observe that there is nothing in the devotion to the Boy Jesus that can be considered novel. This is easily understood from the fact that its object is none other than the Person of Christ, our Lord Himself, the very focus of Christian worship and of Christian life in its every phase and relation. Furthermore, to make the devotion as practical as possible, Father Walsh adds the recommendation that teachers introduce its touching prayer into the class-room itself for daily recital.

Proposed as it is, free from rules and from all formality, this devotion of pedagogical sturdiness and power lends itself to an endless variety of application, following the bent of national temperament on the one hand, and the change of circumstances on the other. Upon its distinctive trait of strong flexibility does its fruitfulness depend, a point which the Holy Father emphasizes in what he has to say regarding the school:

"Perfect schools are the result not so much of good methods as of good teachers . . . who cherish a pure and holy love for the youths confided to them, because they love Jesus Christ and His Church, of which they are the children of predilection; and who have therefore sincerely at heart the true good of family and country."

This he addresses generally to all Christian educators, following Saint Augustine's pithy maxim: "Love, and do as thou wilt!"

## St. Alphonsus and "The Mediatrix of All Graces"

FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R., S.T.D.

*Reprinted from Thought (New York), September, 1932.*

THE fifteenth centenary of the Council of Ephesus, with its thrilling memories of the assemblage of hundreds of bishops in the ancient Eastern city to defend and to proclaim solemnly that Mary is truly the Mother of God, has brought to our mind another doctrine concerning the blessed Handmaid of the Lord—a doctrine which, though not as yet defined by the Church, seems destined to become in the near future a dogma of the Catholic Faith. This is the doctrine that the Blessed Virgin Mary is rightly styled the Mediatrix of all graces.

### I

It is only in comparatively recent times that theologians have undertaken a thorough and scientific investigation of this aspect of Our Lady's relations with the human race. This in no wise militates against the possibility of the truth of Mary's universal mediatorship being contained in the deposit of Christian Revelation as an element of the doctrine of the Redemption. So sublime and so mysterious are the truths implied in or connected with the revelation concerning the Word Incarnate that it was only after diligent study and lengthy discussion that the hierarchy and the theologians of the Church were able to ascertain and to classify these numerous cognate doctrines. Among these are the truths referring to the personal privileges conferred on Mary by reason of her election to the dignity of Mother of God, such as her Immaculate Conception and her perpetual virginity. And when scholars had come to a clear understanding of these prerogatives of our Blessed Lady, they naturally directed their attention to the relations existing between Mary and the other members of the human race in consequence of her important role in the Divine drama of the world's redemption. To these belongs her

office of Mediatrix of all the graces conferred on mankind since the Son of God took flesh.

Prominent among those who have striven to defend and to propagate the doctrine of Mary's universal mediatorship is St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori, Doctor of the Church and Founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. It would be incorrect to state that he was the first to teach this doctrine explicitly and formally; nevertheless it is no exaggeration to assert that the importance attached to the question of Our Lady's mediatorial office in Catholic theology of recent times, and the enthusiastic approval extended by Catholics to the title "Mediatrix of all graces" as applied to the Mother of God, are certainly due in large measure to the writings of St. Alphonsus, and especially to his masterpiece of Marian theology and devotion, "The Glories of Mary."

## II

In 1747, Louis Muratori, celebrated Italian savant and priest, published at Venice a work entitled "The Well-Regulated Devotion of Christians." The twenty-second chapter contained a vehement denunciation of certain beliefs regarding the Blessed Virgin and of certain devotions in her honor, which the author characterized as unjustifiable effusions of piety, akin to superstition. Among the beliefs most severely reprobated was the view that all graces depend on the mediation of Mary. Muratori admitted that this principle could be defended in the sense that Mary gave to the world Christ, through whose merits all graces are bestowed, but to attribute to her a more direct mediatorial function he condemned as derogatory to the mediatorship of Christ and as tending to minimize the intercessory power of the saints. For, he asked, what is the use of praying to the saints if it is only through the Blessed Virgin that one can obtain favors?

In justice to the profound scholarship and to the sincere piety of Muratori it must be stated that other parts of his book are unimpeachable in their Catholic tone and highly commendable for their endeavor to warn the Faithful against opinions and practices that are undoubtedly superstitious. It must also be noted that the tribunal of the Inquisition, after carefully examining Muratori's works,

declared them to be worthy of no censure (*Dictionnaire de Vacant*, "Muratori"). At the same time it cannot be denied that theology was not Muratori's forte, and that the influence exerted on him, as on so many Catholic scholars of his time, by the widespread errors of Jansenism prevented him from grasping the genuine Catholic concept of Mary's place in the economy of Redemption.

On account of Muratori's reputation for learning, his book had a rapid and extensive circulation, both in Italy and in other countries of Europe. To Alphonsus de' Liguori, then laboring on the missions around Naples at the head of his little band of zealous priests, the chapter inveighing against devotion to Our Lady was an irresistible challenge to take up the pen in defense of his beloved Madonna. Thirty years previously, Alphonsus, then a young lawyer at the apex of his fame, had laid his sword on Mary's altar as a symbol of his renunciation of the world and as a pledge of the consecration of his life to the service of Mary's Son. Shortly after his ordination to the priesthood, Alphonsus had begun to gather material for a work on the Blessed Virgin, but the multiplicity of his occupations had prevented him from arranging it in a form suitable for publication. Now the occasion was at hand; the Catholic world must be provided with an antidote against the deleterious teachings of Muratori. And so, in 1750, the first edition of "The Glories of Mary" appeared at Naples. So popular has this apology of Marian devotion proved, that it has not only gone through numerous editions in the original Italian, but has also been translated into practically all living languages. Only a portion of the fifth chapter is professedly a refutation of Muratori; but the entire work is in fact a protest against the tendency—so little in keeping with the traditional attitude of Catholicism—to minimize the cult of the Blessed Virgin.

Muratori died the same year that "The Glories of Mary" appeared, but in 1755 his nephew, Don Soli, undertook the defense of his uncle's views in an anonymous pamphlet. Others besides Alphonsus had written in refutation of Muratori, and it was principally against the Sicilian Jesuit, Father Benedict Piazza, whose Latin work, published in 1751, was entirely and professedly directed



against the opinions of Muratori, that Soli devoted the major portion of his pamphlet. However, in an appendix he reiterated his uncle's condemnation of the doctrine of Mary's universal mediatorship, with special reference to the author of "The Glories of Mary," whom he accused of misrepresenting Muratori's doctrines. Again our saint accepted the opportunity to vindicate the honor of his Heavenly Queen and in a brochure entitled "Response to an Anonymous Writer," published in 1756, reaffirmed the doctrine of Mary's universal mediatorship, corroborating it with a wealth of patristic citations. Finally, in 1775, Alphonsus, then in his eightieth year, wrote a reply along the same lines to the Abbate Rolli, who like Muratori had taken umbrage at what he considered exaggeration in expressions and in devotions in honor of the Blessed Virgin. These two supplementary writings, together with several of the saint's sermons on Our Lady, are now incorporated in "The Glories of Mary."

### III

In this noteworthy contribution to Marian literature—probably the most widely read book on the Blessed Virgin in the world—St. Alphonsus has successfully accomplished that most difficult task of combining theology and devotion so felicitously that neither overshadows or underrates the other. Moreover, in his exposition and demonstration of the doctrine of Mary's universal mediatorship he has pointed out what would seem to be a sure way to the elevation of this doctrine to the dignity of an article of Catholic Faith. This becomes evident when one perceives the full meaning of the doctrine, and examines the mode of argumentation employed by the saint.

In calling Mary the Mediatrix of all graces we mean that the acquisition and the bestowal of all the supernatural favors conferred on mankind depend in some measure on her participation with her Divine Son in the accomplishment of human salvation. The adequate concept of her mediation embraces two elements—first, her active co-operation with Christ in the work of the Redemption, accomplished nineteen centuries ago; secondly, her concurrence in the communication to individual souls of the

graces merited by the Redemption, which will continue until the end of time. By reason of the former element Mary is called the *Co-Redemptrix*; by reason of the latter she is designated the *Dispensatrix* of all graces.

Now, even though the entire Church believed as an indubitable fact that Mary exercises a mediatorial office in this twofold way, this fact could never be officially declared a matter of Catholic Faith unless it is proved to be contained in the deposit of Revelation bequeathed by Christ and by His Apostles to the custody of the Church. It need not necessarily be found among the revealed truths in the form of an explicit and specific statement; but it must be present in this deposit of Faith at least implicitly—that is, as a component element of some truth that is certainly revealed. And theologians admit that it is not an easy thing to prove that the doctrine of Mary's universal mediatorship—especially the second element, her participation in the distribution of all graces—is actually contained in its entirety in any of the truths of revelation. Hence, the value of the service rendered by St. Alphonsus in "The Glories of Mary."

With keen theological acumen Alphonsus realized that every prerogative of the Blessed Virgin must have its foundation in her motherhood of the Saviour; and so he based the first element of her mediatorship on the fact that she became the Mother of the Redeemer. It was not, however, the mere *physical* function of Mary's maternity that established her in this role—for that would make her a cooperator in the Redemption in an indirect manner only, such as was conceded by Muratori—but it was her *moral and direct* participation arising from her free acceptance of the office of Mother of the Saviour, with all the obligations and sufferings it involved. St. Alphonsus refers to this point several times in the fifth chapter of his book; and in the Sermon for the Feast of the Purification he amplifies this idea by stating that the Eternal Father willed that not only the birth of the Redeemer but also His sacrificial death on the Cross should depend on the free consent of Mary, and that accordingly her voluntary acceptance of the motherhood of the Saviour was an essential factor in the accomplishment of the Redemption. These assertions are not mere devotional extrava-

gances, but are deductions from sound theological principles. For Mary was sufficiently versed in the Old Testament prophecies to know that the Redeemer of the world was to be a man of sorrows, bruised and sacrificed for the iniquities of Adam's children; and so by the momentous *fiat* whereby she informed the Heavenly messenger of her willingness to give the redeeming Victim to the world, she undertook with full volition a most important part in the accomplishments of human Redemption, and thus justly merited for herself the title of Co-Redemptrix.

#### IV

The principal theological argument adduced by St. Alphonsus for Our Lady's participation in the second element of mediatorship—the distribution of graces—is stated in the fifth chapter of "The Glories of Mary" and in reply to Don Soli. Briefly it is this: One who cooperates in acquiring treasure has a right to participate in its disbursement. Since, therefore, Mary cooperated with Christ in the acquisition of the treasures of grace merited by the Redemption, she is entitled to an active part in their distribution to mankind.

In the mind of Alphonsus, this argument was not one of mere congruity. He regarded Mary's participation in the dispensation of graces as one of the elements of the Divine plan that decreed that a man and a woman—Christ and Mary—should collaborate in repairing the damage inflicted on humanity by another man and woman—Adam and Eve. This plan is manifested both in Scripture and in Tradition, which emphasize the intimate association of Mary with her Son in the economy of salvation. Thus, in the first book of the Bible the promised Messiah is described as "the seed of the woman" (Genesis iii, 15), and in the last book it is "the woman clothed with the sun" who brings forth Him who is to rule all nations (Apocalypse xii).

It is most interesting to note that the line of argumentation adopted by St. Alphonsus to vindicate Mary's part in the distribution of all graces has recently been developed in a complete and scientific manner by Canon Bitremieux of Louvain in his justly praised work *De*

*mediatione universali Beatae Mariae Virginis.* To the principle underlying this argument he has given the appropriate name of *principium consortii*—the principle of association—inasmuch as it designates the Divine decree whereby Mary is to be associated with her Son throughout the entire work of the Redemption, from the conception of the Redeemer to the distribution of redemptive graces to individual souls.

In demonstrating Mary's cooperation in the dispensation of graces, St. Alphonsus frequently employs quotations from the writings of saints and of theologians, especially the works of St. Bernard. It has been objected that our saint manifested a very imperfect knowledge of patristic literature, and often based his conclusions on unauthentic writing; but in an appendix to the most recent German edition of "The Glories of Mary" the Rev. J. Litz, C.S.S.R., shows that of the numerous quotations employed by Alphonsus comparatively few can be proved to be spurious.

To the objection of Muratori that it is derogatory to the perfection of Christ's mediatorial office to attribute a mediatorship to Mary, St. Alphonsus replies that there is a twofold mediatorship—that of justice and that of grace. The former belongs exclusively to Our Divine Saviour, and that by way of condign merit; but to Mary is granted a mediatorship of grace entirely dependent on the merits of Christ, and exercised by way of intercessory prayer. By this last phrase the Holy Doctor shows that he does not approve of the view that would make Mary a *physical* cause of grace—as if supernatural favors were literally transmitted through her to mankind. It is sufficiently honorable to her, and more soundly theological, to attribute to her merely a *moral* causality, consisting in this, that by her constant prayer in Heaven she efficaciously moves the Divine Trinity to grant all the favors that are bestowed on the children of men. It would seem to be the mind of the saint, however—although he did not expressly consider this phase of the question—that Mary's part in the distribution of graces is not limited to intercession for mankind in general, but is exercised for every human soul visualized in its individuality.

To Muratori's complaint that the doctrine of Mary's

universal mediatorship in the dispensation of graces would render the invocation of the saints futile. Alphonsus replied that there is nothing incongruous in the idea that the saints direct their prayers to God with due subordination to the intercession of Our Lady. Thus, both the mediatorial office of Mary with respect to all graces and the efficacy of the prayers of the other Blessed are safeguarded.

## V

The belief that Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces is not as yet an article of Faith, and there are theologians of good standing—such as Dr. Ude of the University of Graz in his recent work, *Ist Maria die Mittlerin aller Gnadem?*—who oppose the definition of this doctrine. In this they are fully within their rights, for as yet no pronouncement of the Church has imposed the obligation of admitting that our Heavenly Queen possesses this privilege. Yet, authoritative acts and statements of the Church give a certain measure of approval to the designation of Mary as Mediatrix of all graces. A feast of Our Lady under this consoling title has been granted to some dioceses and Religious Orders; and expressions favoring the doctrine appear in the encyclical letters of recent Sovereign Pontiffs, such as “De Rosario” of Leo XIII (Sept. 22, 1891), and “Ad illum diem” of Pius X (Feb. 2, 1904).

It is therefore, the fervent hope of many Catholic hearts in which love for the blessed Mother of God burns brightly that the day is not far distant when the voice of the infallible Church will proclaim as an article of Faith that Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces. And when that happy day arrives, it is certain that among the Blessed who will stand near to Mary's throne in Heaven to celebrate this new jewel in her diadem of glory will be Alphonsus de' Liguori.